



Political parties of Kosovo Serbs in the political system of Kosovo:

April
2021

From pluralism
to monism



Characteristics
of the open society
within Serb community
in Kosovo

Openness of Serbian
media in Kosovo

Civil society
organizations in the
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perceptions and
presentation

**Political
parties of
Kosovo Serbs in
the political system
of Kosovo: From
pluralism to
monism**

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Openness of institutions
to the citizens of Kosovo

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Kosovo Serbs in the
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economic situation in
the Serb-populated
areas in Kosovo

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1. Introduction

Executive summary

Political parties and the politics of Kosovo Serbs have developed in a complex socio-political environment. Caught between the hammer and the anvil, political-economic dependence and from Belgrade requested loyalty, as well as pressures to take part in Kosovo political life, Kosovo Serbs, despite numerous attempts, have mainly been restricted in the articulation of their politics. Faced with a demographic deficit, shortage of human potential and the loss of intellectual and academic elite, they have (except in rare moments) been doomed to be a political instrument, not an important political player. Given the circumstances, the development of political parties and party system of Kosovo Serbs was chaotic, ad hoc and conditioned by broader political and social trends, including the issue of the status of Kosovo and political changes in Belgrade.

This analysis deals with the issue of political pluralism in the political and party system of Kosovo Serbs since 1999 until present time and the perception of citizens of political parties. By conducting an analysis of six dimensions of impact on the development of the party system, i. e.: time dimension; geographic dimension; political and ideologic dimension; partocracy and clientelism; role and impact of Belgrade on Kosovo Serbs; the party and electoral system, the authors give an insight into trajectories of historical development of political parties and reasons of the absence of political pluralism. The authors determined that a critical point that defined the trajectory of development of

the political and party system of Kosovo Serbs was signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013, that the key role in functioning of political parties and political representatives of the Serbs in Kosovo has historically been that of Belgrade and that there is a need in the dialogue process to maintain by whatever means a political unity of Kosovo Serbs, which further leads to political and party monism and absence of pluralism. Political parties of Kosovo Serbs are more an instrument than protagonists of political developments. The absence of political pluralism has as a consequence a heightened degree of partocracy and there are clientelist relations between parties and citizens, as due to not having sufficiently built-up institutions, a party has become a place from which an ascend in the social hierarchy is possible.

The authors determined the existence of a high level of alienation from the world of politics among Kosovo Serbs which is reflected in mistrust in political activism, as well as a lack of openness and existence of fear to state one's own opinion. The conducted public opinion research also indicates a lack of trust in political parties and their representatives. Citizens doubt the intentions of political representatives, which is reflected in their belief that politicians care predominantly of their personal interests and do not understand the needs of citizens. The authors conclude that there is a need for a long-term work with citizens, as well as for a change of institutional environment in order to improve functioning of the political party system, and that a success of such intervention will depend on political and social environment and context.

2. Goal of the study and research methodology

The overall goal of the research is to provide measurable data on pursuance of democratic principles and pluralism of the political parties of Kosovo Serbs. A specific goal of the research is to determine the reasons of the absence of political pluralism in the political life of Kosovo Serbs and the openness of citizens and political parties to participate in political institutions of Kosovo. The principal research question conducive to the attainment of the overall and specific goal is: What are the reasons of the absence of political pluralism within the Serb community in Kosovo.

Time of the research: the research was conducted in the period 1-20 October 2020

Manner of data gathering: face-to-face (F2F), device-to-device, (D2D)

Survey taker work control: Google maps (GPS) live location sharing

Type: paper, pencil

Research instrument: questionnaire consisting of 65 questions

Population: 18+

Sample type: non-random, quota

Quota determining criterion: size of

municipality of residence according to predetermined quotas for municipalities and settlements south (287/300) and north of the Ibar (295/300)

Sample size: 582 respondents residing in the Serbian community in Kosovo

Confidence interval: + / - 5% for 50 % expected incidence

Disclaimer: Due to the fact that there are no statistical data on demographic structure of the targeted population, i. e. Serbian population in Kosovo, it could only conditionally be said that it is a representative sample.

Methodology and design of quantitative research:

The face-to-face survey was conducted in the period from 1 October through 20 October 2020. In total, 582 citizens of Serbian ethnicity living on the entire territory of Kosovo were included in the survey. Out of that, 50.5 % of respondents south of the Ibar and 49.5 % respondents north of the Ibar were included in the survey. The questionnaire consists of 65 questions covering 8 areas. The sample is non-random, the quota and quota determining criterion is the size of population of a municipality. Confidence interval is +/-5. The sample is made of 54.7 % of men and 45.3 % of

women. The average age of respondents is 44. Out of the total number, 14.4 % of respondents are with completed elementary school, 62.1 % with completed secondary school and 23.5 % of respondents are with completed higher school or faculty. Out of the total number of respondents, 25.9 % are employed in the public sector, 22.3 % in the private sector, 35.2 % are unemployed and 16.6 % are retired persons. It is important to point out that due to the fact that there are no statistical data on the demographic structure of the targeted population, i. e. Serbian population in Kosovo, it could only conditionally be said that it is a representative sample.

Qualitative research:

Critical analysis: Beside the quantitative method, three qualitative methods were employed in the research – critical analysis, focus groups with citizens, and interviews with representatives of political parties and decision makers. In defining a theoretic base of the research and the relevant topic in the sphere of political parties, relevant literature on political parties, party systems, party competition and elections was used. Additionally, the critical analysis is improved with texts on Balkanology and history of resolving the Kosovo issue, as well as on media, which were used in describing the chronology of events.

Interviews: The critical analysis in this research is supplemented with interviews (elite interviews) with representatives of five political parties of Kosovo Serbs and focus groups with citizens in order to determine the perception of citizens of political parties and their confidence in them. Interviews were done with the representatives of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), the Party of Kosovo Serbs (PKS), the National Justice (NJ), the Serbian Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija and the New Party of Kosovo (NPK) which accepted the invitation for the interview.

Focus groups: The research also included 4 focus groups with 28 citizens from the north and south

of Kosovo segmented by sex and age. The focus groups provided a deeper insight into perceptions of citizens of political parties, which gave us an idea of how citizens see the Kosovo Serb party scene, party structure and impact of parties on everyday life.

Methodology and design of qualitative research:

FOCUS GROUPS

Time of the research:

the research was conducted in the period 1-18 September 2020

Research instrument:

16-question talk guide

No. of focus groups:

4 focus groups

Total No. of participants:

28 participants (7 participants in each focus groups)

Participant selection criterion:

sex, age

INTERVIEWS

Time of the research:

the research was conducted in the period 10-20 October 2020

Research instrument:

11-question interview guide

Total No. of interviewees:

5 interviewees

Interviewee selection criterion:

political party membership

3. Political parties of Kosovo Serbs, from pluralism to monism

Introduction

The political parties and politics of Kosovo Serbs since 1999 and the arrival of international forces in Kosovo, as well as immediately prior and after the declaration of independence of Kosovo, have been developing in a complex socio-political environment. Kosovo Serbs and their political representatives have been facing numerous challenges torn between their own desires and aspirations not to accept the integration within the Kosovo political and legal system and the political reality forcing them to do so. Historically, the Kosovo issue required political uniformity of the Serbian political corps and the ruling circles from Belgrade required unity and agreement. Caught between the anvil and the hammer, political and economic dependence, loyalty demanded from Belgrade and pressures to take part in Kosovo political life, Serbs from Kosovo, despite numerous attempts, could not articulate an autochthonous politics. Faced with a demographic deficit, population moving out of Kosovo, shortage of human potential and loss of intellectual and academic elite, they were doomed (except in rare moments) to be a political instrument, not an important political protagonist. In such circumstances, the development of political parties and party system of Kosovo Serbs has been chaotic, ad hoc and conditioned by broader political and social trends such as resolving the status of Kosovo and

political changes in Belgrade. Until 2014, political parties of Kosovo Serbs (especially in the north of Kosovo, and to a somewhat lesser extent in the south) were predominantly subsidiaries of bigger political parties from Serbia. The political power of Kosovo Serb leaders depended on the power of their political patrons in Belgrade and with the changes of power in Serbia the political hierarchy among Kosovo Serb parties changed. Simultaneously with the negotiations on the status of Kosovo and normalization of relations Belgrade insisted on the political loyalty of Kosovo Serbs whose collaboration and acceptance of integration conditioned the international position of Belgrade as a credible partner. The nature of political order, non-existence of stable institutions and a democratic deficit in the Balkans, predominantly in Serbia and Kosovo, have had a strong impact on the development of political parties of Kosovo Serbs. In the region dominated by a low level of observance of human rights and unsatisfactory level of democratic political tradition it is difficult to establish functional political systems with clear rules of the game and with political parties as a link between voters and political institutions. In that sense, the perception of the absence of freedom and pressures exerted on citizens by political and institutional representatives is an important limiting factor to political organizing of the Serbs from Kosovo. That is why it is essential to define reasons of the absence of political pluralism among Kosovo Serbs.

4. Impacts on the development of party system of Kosovo Serbs

As stated by Slaviša Orlović, party system is usually conditioned by social environment and institutional framework in which parties act. According to him, those impacts are multiple, both on the nature of the competition and abilities of parties to attain the desired goals. "The number of parties in one country increases with the diversity of social structure and proportional electoral system, but these effects are also interactive."¹ In that sense, the dynamics and trends of the development of party system of Kosovo Serbs may be observed on 6 planes and they are: time dimension; geographical dimension; political and ideological dimensions; partocracy and clientelism; the role and impact of Belgrade on Kosovo Serbs; parties and electoral system.

Time dimension of the impact on the development of political parties of the Serbs in Kosovo

The development of political parties of Kosovo Serbs can be divided into two periods. The first, from 2000 until 2013 and the second that is

underway since 2013, i. e. signing of the Brussels Agreement and beginning of integration of almost entire Kosovan-Serb spectrum within the legal framework of Kosovo. The first period from 2000 until 2013 was characterized by refusal and difficulties of political representatives of Kosovo Serbs and their political parties to integrate in the Kosovo institutions. This refers both to the period before and after the declaration of independence of Kosovo. Although Serbs participated occasionally in Kosovo elections and central Kosovo institutions with when certain political parties and election lists those in power in Belgrade did not support them in that, even the political representatives of the Serbs, particularly in the north, were not very enthusiastic about that. The exception was 2001, when, with the support from Belgrade, the Return (*Povratak*) Coalition won approximately 80,000 votes and 22 seats in the Assembly and was in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture in the government. Nonetheless, due to its disunity, lack of cohesion and vague signals from the authorities in Belgrade, this coalition was not successful in the Assembly and the Government of Kosovo. According to one of the leaders of that coalition, they were ignored in the Assembly of Kosovo, their motions and amendments were constantly rejected which led

¹ Orlović, S. (2001), The party system of Serbia, page 11, in *Parties and elections in Serbia – 20 years*, Čigaja štampa.

to frequent leaving the meetings and institutions.² The 2004 March unrests marked an end to a more significant participation of political parties of the Serbs. In the period until 2013, the international community and political elites in Prishtina failed to make Kosovo Serbs, particularly those in the north, participate in Kosovo institutions. The 2004 and 2007 parliamentary elections, as well as local elections for municipal councils were mainly boycotted by the political representatives of the Serbs. As a consequence of the political division and a cohabitation of Boris Tadić and Vojislav Koštunica, Kosovo Serbs were receiving unclear signals and those who under such circumstances favored the boycott of elections and Kosovo institutions were political winners of such disagreements. Politics of the north Kosovo Serbs in the period 2000-2013 mainly continued to be pursued through Serbian institutions deemed by Prishtina as parallel. Serbs participated in political life through branches of political parties in Kosovo and the political scene predominantly mirrored Serbian political scene where conservative parties like SRS (Serbian Radical Party) and DSS (Democratic Party of Serbia) won the majority of votes. Yet, political power in that period was dispersed and there were several poles of political power depending on political changes that were underway in Belgrade. An exception in that period was forming the Independent Liberal Party (ILP) in 2006 which advocated participation in Kosovo political processes. ILP participated in the 2007 elections at the central level and won 3 seats, yet with questionable legitimacy as only 2500 voted for the Serb lists. This party became the leading political party of the Serbs in the 2009 local elections in which it participated despite the opposition from Belgrade. It won elections in Gračanica, Klokot, Ranilug and achieved its maximum after the 2010 parliamentary elections, winning a significant number of votes of the Serbs south of the Ibar and had an important position in the Government of Kosovo.

² Interviews with one of the representatives of the *Povratak* Coalition, 15 September 2020

Brussels Agreement from April 2013 entirely changed the political dynamics of Kosovo Serbs as it enabled for the first time after 2001 participation of the entire Serb political spectrum in Kosovo. Having prevailed over a long-standing resistance of political representatives of the Serbs from the north who opposed integration, and to enable the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, Belgrade formed the Serb List (*Srpska lista*) Civic Initiative, a catch-all political entity to be reregistered into a party in 2017. Through two consecutive cycles of local elections in 2013 and 2017, and three circles of parliamentary elections, 2014, 2017 and 2019, *Srpska lista* consolidated its power and caused tectonic changes on the political scene of Kosovo Serbs. Other parties or their members either joined *Srpska lista* or were pushed to the margin through a series of pressures and electoral defeats. *Srpska lista* currently holds absolute control over all 10 Serb-majority municipalities, as well as 10 parliamentary seats reserved for the Serb community in Kosovo and therefore a guaranteed seat in the Government of Kosovo.

Geographical dimension of the development of political parties of Kosovo Serbs

Kosovo Serbs are geographically divided among a relatively cohesive geographic area of four Serb-majority municipalities in the north and scattered geographical areas south of the Ibar. There is a bigger Serb population in central Kosovo and the vicinity of Gračanica, in the Morava region, around Štrpce and partly in the west in Metohija. The exact number of the Serbs living in Kosovo is not known as they mainly boycotted the 2011 census. This geographical division also created long-term diverse political and economic consequences. While the Serbs south of the Ibar were earlier forced into integration in the Kosovo political and legal system and had to be pretty flexible when collaboration with Kosovo institutions was in question, Serbs in the north of Kosovo resisted integration until 2013. The initial geographical division of Serbian representatives started in the early 2000s when until

then the united Serbian National Council (*Srpsko nacionalno veće, SNV*) split up and part of political representatives founded the Serbian National Council of the North of Kosovo. That political gap between the Serbs in the north and in the south became particularly visible following 2008 and the declaration of independence of Kosovo when the political representatives of the Serbs in southern municipalities participated in a respectable number in the 2010 elections for the Assembly of Kosovo and the Independent Liberal Party (*Samostalna liberalna stranka, SLS*) and the Unique Serb List (*Jedinstvena Srpska lista, JSL*) were the leading political subjects. With financial and logistical support from Belgrade that enabled maintaining Serb institutions in the north of Kosovo and provided a security backing due to the geographical position, representatives of political parties in the north of Kosovo were uncompromising regarding the integration requests. It was the Brussels Agreement that made possible for the first time since 2001 setting up coherent and cohesive political parties of the Serbs active over the entire Serb-populated territory of Kosovo spearheaded by the Serb List (SL) enjoying an unquestionable support of Belgrade.

The role of Belgrade and its impact on the development of political parties in Kosovo

Belgrade has historically had a key role in the functioning of political parties and political representatives of Kosovo Serbs. Kosovo politicians of Serb ethnicity are under a constant watch by Serbian institutions and key political figures are supported by those in power in Belgrade. That is why the political and social circumstances in Belgrade are reflected on the political situation among Kosovo Serbs. The existence of absence of pluralism in Belgrade is also transferred to Kosovo Serbs, so at the time when the political and party system in Serbia was pronouncedly pluralist from 2000 until 2014 there was also certain pluralism among Kosovo Serbs. At the time of political pluralism it was possible to hear disagreements with the authorities in Belgrade, which was particularly noticeable from 2008 until

2013 when local authorities in certain municipalities in the north of Kosovo were fiercely opposing the republic authorities. Paradoxically, since the Brussels Agreement in 2013 and the beginning of integration of the Serbs in the Kosovo legal and political system and putting an end to the opposition of political representatives from the north and after launching the Serb List Civic Initiative (SL), dissenting voices were not allowed and the opposition parties and their representative were often exposed to serious pressures having as a consequence their changing the side, marginalization or withdrawal from politics. Representative from Belgrade, primarily the Office for Kosovo and Metohija took part in the Serb List campaign and openly supported the representatives of this party and canvassed citizens to vote for them both at local and central-level elections.

Yet, the political influence of Belgrade on Kosovo Serbs should not be simplified and it is not a simple phenomenon. Due to its historical role, demographic factors, economic, political and security dependence, Kosovo Serbs seek existential security in their relationship with Belgrade seeing it as their guardian. Serbs from Kosovo are a relatively small community, heavily affected by the war and exposed to a missive brain drain³. Kosovo Serbs are also economically dependent on Belgrade and this dependence implies political dependence as well. Serbia is by far making the biggest investments in the Serb-populated areas in Kosovo, incomparably bigger than those of the Government of Kosovo or the international community. Only for the activities of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija the amount of EUR 67 million⁴ was apportioned from the budget of Serbia. However, the funds distributed by Belgrade to Kosovo Serbs are significantly higher as the funds appropriated for the Office for Kosovo and Methoija do not include the funds transferred through ministries for institutions, schools, health-care system and

3 NGO AKTIV (2019), Trend Analysis, it is said that 55.3 % of Kosovo Serbs intend to leave Kosovo in the next 5 years, two thirds of which are with higher education.

4 RFE: Serbia is planning even bigger budgetary expenses for Kosovo, available on: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-kosovo-budzet/30258118.html>

the Serbian republic public administration in Kosovo. In addition to that, there is a support given to enterprises, subsidies and regular investments which in the past few years amount to tens of millions of euros⁵. Having all mentioned in mind, annual apportionments from Belgrade for Kosovo exceed several hundreds of millions of euros. Therefore, if we understand the security, economic and political dependence, there is no wonder why Kosovo Serbs, without much hesitation, despite the pressure, listen to messages from Belgrade and pledge their political loyalty to the political representatives supported by Belgrade. Beside that, one of the pillars of Serbia's foreign policy is the perception of international community that Belgrade is cooperative when Kosovo is in question and that it is dedicated to the dialogue on normalization of relations. It is important for Belgrade to control Kosovo Serbs and their political representatives to be able to implement the agreements made, as well as to dictate the pace of negotiations and integration of the Serbs in Kosovo society. This control of Serb political representatives is also important for Belgrade as it enables the control of the work of institutions in Serb-majority municipalities, as well as the maintenance of influence in the process of forming the Government of Kosovo.

Political and ideological dimension of the development of political parties of Kosovo Serbs

The majority of political parties of Kosovo Serbs is not sufficiently ideologically profiled. They are rather a mix of ideological orientations. Based on the analysis of pretty general programs and publicly stated views, it cannot be clearly concluded how those political parties are positioned along a "left-right" ideological continuum. This particularly applies to the socio-

economic line of division as parties are divided into the socio-economical "left" and the socio-economical "right". It is also questionable if there is a division into "nationalists" and "cosmopolites", as the political and party system based on consociationalism and provision of rights of minorities to participate in institutions necessary directs parties of non-majority communities toward a declarative "nationalism" rather than "cosmopolitanism". What is noticeable as an ideological and political difference within the Serb community is a division into those political parties favoring a certain form of cooperation and integration, based either on ideological or pragmatic views, and those opposing the integration. An obvious representative of the former would be the Independent Liberal Party or the Progressive Democratic Party who advocated integration and participation in institutions, whereas of the latter that would be the former Serb National Council of the North of Kosovo (SNC) or the present Fatherland (*Otdžbna*) Movement resisting any integration. That form of ideological conflict also existed among the political representatives of the SNC which led to their splitting up. The other division is that on "democratic" and "nondemocratic" which is getting more pronounced and is a consequence of the absence of political pluralism within the Serb community in Kosovo. What is obvious is that the ruling political parties of the Serbs supported by Belgrade are historically led by the ideology of the official national patriotism. For the purpose of a proclaimed national unity for the sake of the "defense of Kosovo" there is a need for political party monism and labelling others as traitors or collaborators of the "Albanians".

Partocracy and clientelist relations between citizens and political parties

Political life of Kosovo Serbs is characterized by partocracy and clientelist relations between citizens and political parties in power. According

5 N1: Vučić: Approximately EUR 50 million of additional investments in Kosovo, available on: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/4431890/Vucic-o-investicijama-na-Kosovu.html>

to Orlović, "partocracy is a rule of parties, i. e. a political system in which parties prevail over constitutional state bodies."⁶ Partocracy in the Serb-majority places is best reflected in an absolute control over employment in institutions and public enterprises by the political parties in power, as well as over appointing management in key public organizations. That way a clientelist relationship is established between parties and citizens in which citizens feel to be under pressure to vote for parties in power fearing they would lose their job or would not be able to get job in the future. This view is confirmed in the survey in which approximately 90 % of respondents say that people join political parties primarily to get a good job. There is not a firm party identification among Kosovo Serbs, which is explained by fluctuations in party membership, i. e. the existence of turncoats. In the majority of cases such "transfers" are from the opposition to the ruling parties. Having in mind that voters can have material gain mainly in a way other than by access to public goods, which is through party clientelism, political parties of Kosovo Serbs may be deemed predominantly clientelist parties. As stated by Vladimir Goati, clientelist parties win membership by providing selective (not collective) gains in the form of "patronage, preferential treatment in distribution of social subsidies (funds etc.) and government agreements". In addition to this, there are status incentives, i. e. fast-track professional promotion and/or fast ascending the political "pyramid".⁷

The party and electoral system

Giovanni Sartori classifies party systems into low fragmentation systems with less than five parties, and high fragmentation systems with more than five parties. Based on that, he further classifies party systems into one-party system; hegemonic party system; predominant party system; two-

party system; systems with limited pluralism; systems with extreme pluralism and atomized systems⁸. Based on all stated, until 2013 there was a kind of a limited pluralism among political parties of Kosovo Serbs, and it was possible for the parties to compete for voters in relatively free elections, and at that time relatively greater number of parties had representatives at the central level and in local self-government which often required forming coalitions at the local level. The change of party system came with the 2013 local elections and establishing the Serb List Civic Initiative with an absolute support by the Belgrade authorities. Presently, having in mind that the Serb List has an absolute majority in all 10 Serb-majority municipalities, with only traces of representatives of the opposition, and that it won all 10 guaranteed seats belonging to the Serb community in the Assembly of Kosovo, it can be said that there is a hegemonic party system or a system in which the opposition parties or movements may exist but due to numerous restrictions, from pressures and inaccessibility of mass media, are not able to compete on equal terms with the dominant party.

A great contribution in the creation of such a party system, in addition to the request for "unity of the Serbs", was that of the central level electoral system, as well as constitutional rules providing for that government representatives from non-majority communities need to be supported by the elected representatives of that community in the Assembly.⁹ Having in mind that Kosovo Serbs have 10 guaranteed seats in the Government of Kosovo, political parties of Kosovo Serbs have a great impact on forming and functioning of institutions. That is why it is important for the

8 Sartori, Đ (2002), *Parties and Party Systems*, page 115, Filip Višnjić

9 It is stated in Article 96, par. 5 of the Constitution of Kosovo that the election of ministers and deputy ministers from the Serbian and other non-majority communities is to be made after consultations with the parties, coalitions or groups representing communities that do not constitute the majority in Kosovo. If they are appointed from non-MPs, those ministers and deputy ministers require an official approval by the majority of MPs from the parties, coalitions, civic initiatives and independent candidates who declare themselves representatives of the relevant community.

6 Orlović, S (2001), *Party system of Serbia*, page 58, in *Parties and elections in Serbia – 20 years*, Čigoja štampa

7 Goati, V (2007), *Political parties and party systems*, page 138, in *Political parties and party systems*, CEMI

representatives of Belgrade and the Serb List to control all 10 guaranteed MP seats. In Kosovo, MPs are elected according to the proportional system from party lists and seats in the Assembly are distributed by the highest quotient method, i. e. Sainte Laguë Method.¹⁰ And while this method contributes to an optimum proportion between the number of votes won and the number of seats won by a candidate list, when it is applied to the 10 seats guaranteed to Kosovo Serbs, it could be possible that, to get the last, tenth seat it is sufficient to win only 2-3,000 votes. For that reason the pressure exerted on the Belgrade-favored party to win as many votes as possible and prevent any other party of Kosovo Serbs to enter the Kosovo Assembly is even greater.¹¹

Based on a report of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), the 2017 and 2019 elections in Serb-majority places in Kosovo were conducted under a veil of numerous irregularities. As stated by the EU EOM, the elections were marked by the absence of pluralism, whereas the very campaign was not fair due to "intimidation of candidates who were not on the Serb List and supporters of other parties." The EU observation mission also pointed out that the SL was massively supported by the government in Belgrade which also delegitimized other parties of Kosovo Serbs. The opposition parties could not run an effective campaign both because of the shortage of funds, pressures and inaccessibility of media. The EU EOM noted numerous threats to opposition candidates, as well as to voters who were threatened they would lose their jobs or be suspended from work. It is stated in the report that

¹⁰ When determining the least common divisor as a measure for distribution of mandates among candidate lists, the number of votes won by each of the candidate list individually is divided by augmented numbers. Instead of 1 it is 1.4, instead of 2 it is 4, instead of 3 it is 7 etc. up to N being the number of MPs in an electoral unit. The advantage of the Sainte Laguë Method over the D'Hondt Method is in giving a more optimum proportion between the votes won and the number of seats a candidate list won.

¹¹ Beside the Serb List, in 2014 Nenad Rašić's PDS entered the parliament winning 5973 votes, in 2017 Slobodan Petrović from the LSP succeeded in that with 3540 votes won. To enter the parliament in 2019, a Serb party except the Serb List needed approximately 3000. No other party managed to win that number of votes.



Having in mind that Kosovo Serbs have 10 guaranteed seats in the Government of Kosovo, political parties of Kosovo Serbs have a great impact on forming and functioning of institutions. That is why it is important for the representatives of Belgrade and the Serb List to control all 10 guaranteed MP seats.

the fundamental freedoms of choice, speech and assembly were threatened by the ruling party and that their opponents were not protected enough by the official institutions.¹²

¹² EU EOM, 2019 Early parliamentary elections – Final report, available on:

https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eueomkosovo2019_finalreport_en_withcover.pdf

The hardships of opposition activities in Serb-populated places in Kosovo are best illustrated by the fact that two former candidates for the post of mayor of Mitrovica North, Dimitrije Janičijević (SLP) and Oliver Ivanović from the CI SDP, lost their lives under unexplained circumstances in 2014 and 2018 respectively.

5. Who are important players and what are their roles

In the register of political parties kept by the Central Election Commission (CEC), only 5 political parties of Kosovo Serbs are registered. For only three of them it can be said that they are still active in the political life of the Serbs and they are the Serb List (SL), the Party of Kosovo Serbs (PKS) and the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP).¹³ Until recently the Independent Liberal Party (ILP) was active, but they decided to suspend their activities following the failure in the 2019 elections and that party was deleted from the register.¹⁴ The majority of political protagonists among Kosovo Serbs who take part in elections, decide to do that as civic initiatives and in case of not passing the census and staying out of municipal councils or the Assembly of Kosovo they continue their activities as informal groups. In the previous, 2019 parliamentary elections, only four candidate lists of Kosovo Serbs took part.

Serb List (SL), became a dominant Serb political party after signing the Brussels Agreement in 2013. Founded as a civic initiative with the support from Belgrade, it contributed to marginalization of former leaders in the north of Kosovo who opposed integration into Kosovo political and legal system and at the same time it put an end

to the dominance of the Independent Liberal Party in the south of Kosovo. The SL was registered as a political party in 2017, immediately prior to the elections. In two subsequent circles of local elections, in 2013 and 2017 and three circles of early parliamentary elections in 2014, 2017 and 2019, the SL fully consolidated its power and currently is in power in all 10 Serb-majority municipalities and controls all 10 guaranteed seats in the Kosovo Assembly. In the last elections, the SL won 53,861 votes, accounting for even 94 % of all votes cast for Kosovo Serb parties. Since 2014 the SL is a leading Serb party in the Government of Kosovo, and also controls posts of a few deputy ministers, post of the director of the Office for Community Affairs, a governmental body. In terms of political communication, the SL insists on the unity of Kosovo Serbs, emphasizing it is the only party having support of Belgrade and discrediting other parties through a media campaigns accusing them of being disloyal to Serbia.¹⁵

In the government they insist on the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, particularly on establishing the Community of Serb Municipalities, return of displaced persons, economic development and security of the Serbs in Kosovo.

¹³ CEC: Register of political parties, available on: https://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/KOZ_Registri-i-Partive-Politike.pdf

¹⁴ Kosovo-Online: SLP deleted from the Register of political parties in Kosovo, available on: <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/samostalna-liberalna-stranka-izbrisana-iz-registra-politickih-partija-na-kosovu-10-6>

¹⁵ Interviews with representatives of opposition parties, movements and civic initiatives, September-October 2020

Independent Liberal Party (ILP) was founded in 2006 and in the period 2007-2019 it continuously had representatives in the Assembly of Kosovo. It was a key party of Kosovo Serbs in Serb-populated areas south of the Ibar, in power in all 6 Serb communities and had the greatest number of MPs in the Assembly of Kosovo. Representatives of the ILP also led a few ministries. In 2019 elections the ILP did not win enough votes for the Assembly of Kosovo and in June 2020 this party suspended its activities and was deleted from the register of political parties.

Its long-standing president, Slobodan Petrović repeated several times that members of his party and their families were exposed to pressures from the Serb List.¹⁶ In 2013 the ILP was faced with its members leaving the party. The majority of its former members joined the Serb List, including several current mayors and ministers. In the eve of 2019 and 2019 elections members were also leaving the party or giving up their nominations over pressures.

Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) was established in 2013, when Nenad Rašić left the ILP. At that time Rašić was minister for labour and social affairs. In the 2014 elections the PDP won one seat in the Assembly of Kosovo. In the 2017 elections this party remained out of the parliament, whereas in the 2019 elections the PDP was within the Freedom (*Sloboda*) Coalition on the same list with the New Kosovo Party (*Nova partija Kosova*) lead by Dragiša Mirić, and Rada Trajković from the European Movement of Kosovo Serbs. A PDP representative states in the interview that the main problem of the opposition parties of Kosovo Serbs is pressure exerted on them and their voters.

Party of Kosovo Serbs (PKS) was founded in May 2015 after confrontations within the Serb List when one of its funders and a former minister for return Aleksandar Jablanović left it. He was

16 VoA: Conflict of SLP and SL Who is intimidating voters before the elections? <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/sukob-samostalne-liberalne-stranke-i-sprke-liste-ko-zastrašuje-birače-uoči-izbora-/5077530.html>

The majority of political protagonists among Kosovo Serbs who take part in elections, decide to do that as civic initiatives and in case of not passing the census and staying out of municipal councils or the Assembly of Kosovo they continue their activities as informal groups. In the previous, 2019 parliamentary elections, only four candidate lists of Kosovo Serbs took part.

followed by the members loyal to him, mainly from the municipality of Leposavić, including the then mayor of Leposavić, Dragan Jablanović. The PKS and Aleksandar Jablanović insistently criticize the Serb List. In the 2017 local elections they won a sufficient number of seats in the Leposavić council but did not succeed in winning a seat in 2017 and 2019 Kosovo parliamentary elections.

New Kosovo Party (NKP) was founded as a successor to the Serb Kosovo-Metohija Party which participated twice in the Kosovo parliamentary elections, in 2007 and 2010. NKP leader Dragiša Mirić was in Kosovo institutions since 2005, first as advisor to the minister of education in the 2005-2007 Government of Kosovo and after that, from 2007 until 2011 he was an MP in the Assembly of Kosovo. This party was in the Freedom Coalition with the PDP for the 2019 elections, when Dragiša Mirić and other two MP candidates left the coalition over disagreements with Nenad Rašić.¹⁷

17 Večernje Novosti, Mirić from NPK left Freedom with two other MPs, available on: <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:821731-Miric-iz-NPK-sa-dvoje-poslanika-napustio-Slobodu-zbog-Rasicevog-velicanja-tzv-Kosova>

CI Freedom, Democracy, Justice (CI FDJ) was founded in 2013 by a long-standing leader of Kosovo Serbs, Oliver Ivanović, immediately before the first local elections organized in the north of Kosovo. The CI FDJ was the main opponent of the Serb List and in addition to being in the second round of elections for mayors of Mitrovica North and Zvečan, it also won a significant number of councilor seats in both municipalities. The arrest of its leader Oliver Ivanović immediately prior to the repeated mayor elections in 2014, led to gradual loss of membership of this Civic Initiative and several of its councilors joined the Serb List. After three years in prison, Oliver Ivanović was released pending trial and CI FDJ took part in local elections in Mitrovica North in October 2017. It was, like other opposition parties, exposed to a negative media campaign and pressures which led to withdrawal of a few candidates from candidate list. Oliver Ivanović was murdered in January 2018 still under unexplained circumstances. After his death, CI FDJ lost in importance, while part of councilors continued their serving local self-governments independently and some of them joined the Serb List in the 2019 elections.

Fatherland People's Movement was founded by former members of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DPS) gathered around Slaviša Ristić, a former president of Zubin Potok Municipality and Marko Jakšić, Serb leader from the north of Kosovo who opposed integration and Kosovo elections after signing the Brussels Agreement in 2013. They are known for fierce criticism of those in power in Serbia and see participation in Kosovo elections as violation of the Constitution of Serbia.

CI People's Justice was founded in 2013, immediately prior to local elections in the Municipality of Leposavić and won one seat. In the 2017 elections it did not win any seat in the local council. CI People's Justice is critical of the Serb List and it is a member of opposition alliances in Serbia.



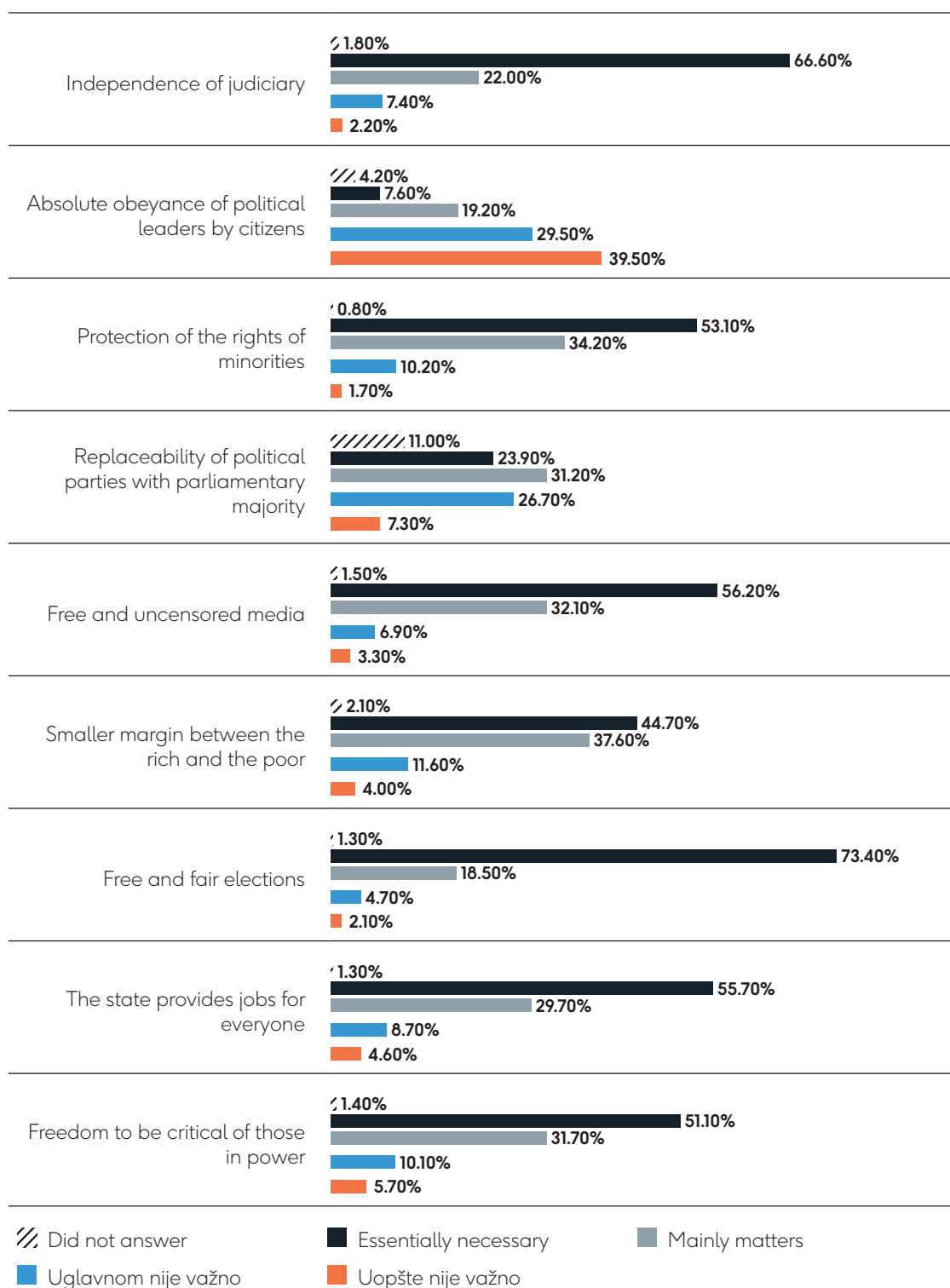
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6. Results of the research and their contextualization

The first question relates to understanding the notion of "democracy". Respondents were offered a list of 9 statements and their task was to evaluate

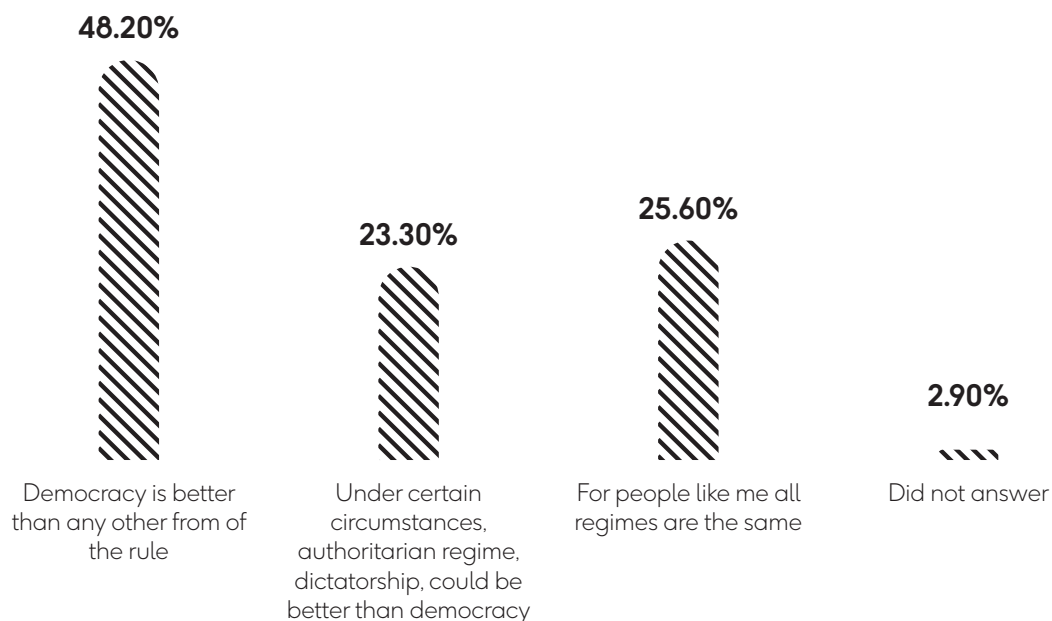
on a four-grade scale the importance of the statements in terming a society democratic. The results are presented in graph 1.

Graph 1. There are many ways in which people understand democracy. Which statements, in your opinion, describe best a democratic society



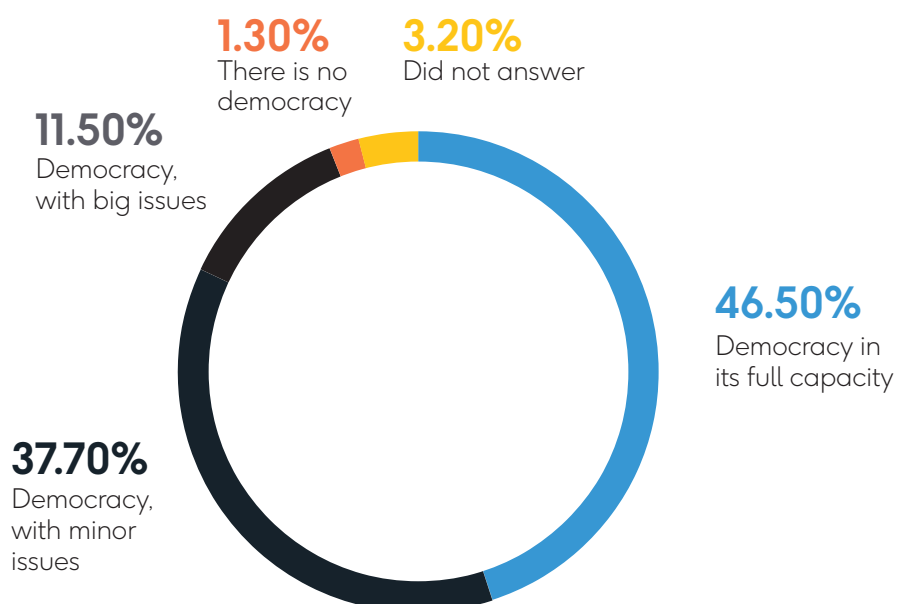
The following question comprised a set of three statements on what democracy should be and the task of respondents was to choose the statement that corresponds most to their view. The results are shown in graph 2.

● **Graph 2.** Which of the following statements corresponds most to your view?



Question No. 3 refers to the assessment of democracy in Kosovo. The result is shown in graph 3.

● **Graph 3.** - How would you evaluate democracy in Kosovo?



The previous three questions are used as instruments in determining the trust of Kosovo Serbs in democracy as a system of rule. Citizens clearly recognized all key features of democracy as important. It is also clear that the great majority of citizens state that democracy is the best form of rule. What is worrying is that a high percentage

of citizens is indifferent, while as many as 23.3 % believe that the authoritarian regime/dictatorship is a better form of rule than democracy.

The following question is which institutions in Kosovo are respected by the Serb population. The result is shown in table 1.

Table 1. To what extent do you have confidence in the following institutions in Kosovo?

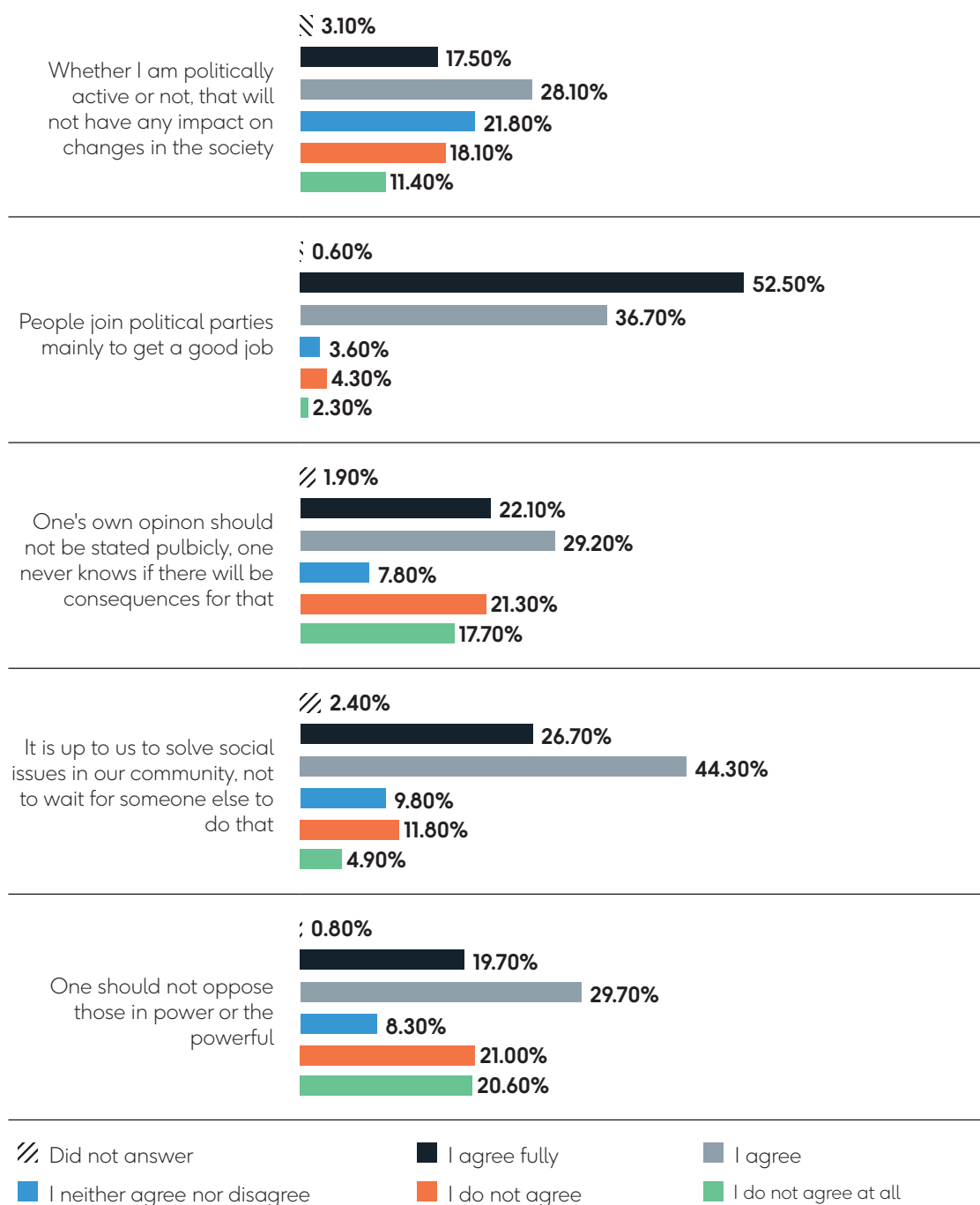
	1	2	3	4	5	NO
Serb political parties	1,1	5,9	4,3	55,6	32,5	0,5
Albanian political parties	3,9	5,3	6,6	30	53,6	0,6
Authorities in Belgrade	0,2	6,2	2,6	40,4	45,7	5
Media	5,6	9,1	5,2	31,7	47,1	1,3
Local self-government in Kosovo	0	4,5	3	35,6	41,3	15,7
Health-care system in Kosovo	2,3	8	6,1	36,8	45,4	1,4
Education in Kosovo	1,7	3,5	5,5	29,2	43,8	16,2
Judiciary in Kosovo	4,3	4,8	3,5	31,3	55,5	0,6
Government of Kosovo	0,6	11,7	12,9	29,1	33,2	12,5
Assembly of Kosovo	4,7	10,7	8,9	30	45,6	0,2
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	1,5	11,4	15,9	27	33,3	10,9
Serbian Orthodox Church	6,5	14,1	10	27,4	41,7	0,3
Municipal crisis headquarters in Kosovo in charge of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic	4,7	16,6	22,6	23,7	29,9	2,4

1 – I do not have at all; 2 – I mainly do not have; 3 – I neither have nor do not have; 4 – I mainly have; 5 – I have fully;
NO – I do not know/do not want to answer; values are expressed in %.

Citizens obviously have the greatest confidence in the authorities in Belgrade, 58 % of them, and the Serbian Orthodox Church with 88.5 % of positive views. They have a slightly lower confidence in Serb political parties which accounts for 43 %. It is obvious that citizens

have a very low level of confidence in Kosovo institutions, the Government and Assembly of Kosovo, as well as in local self-governments and judiciary. Health-care system and education are somewhat more trusted by citizens than institutions.

Graph 4. To what extent do you agree with the following views



A high level of alienation from the world of politics in Serbia is best reflected in responses to statements such as "Citizens mainly join political parties to get a good job" (I agree – 76 %), and "Whether I was politically active that would not have an impact on changes in the society" (I agree – 57.5 %). That there is a certain degree of fear among the Serb population in Kosovo is illustrated by as many as 54 % of those who believe that powerful figures should not be opposed.



"I believe that people here generally do not follow up politics to a great extent, particularly the young, because they know what they could expect, and they are particularly aware in advance that politicians do not want to work for them and solve their problems, problems at the local level, and that is why they do not follow up politics and do not want to listen about it."¹⁸

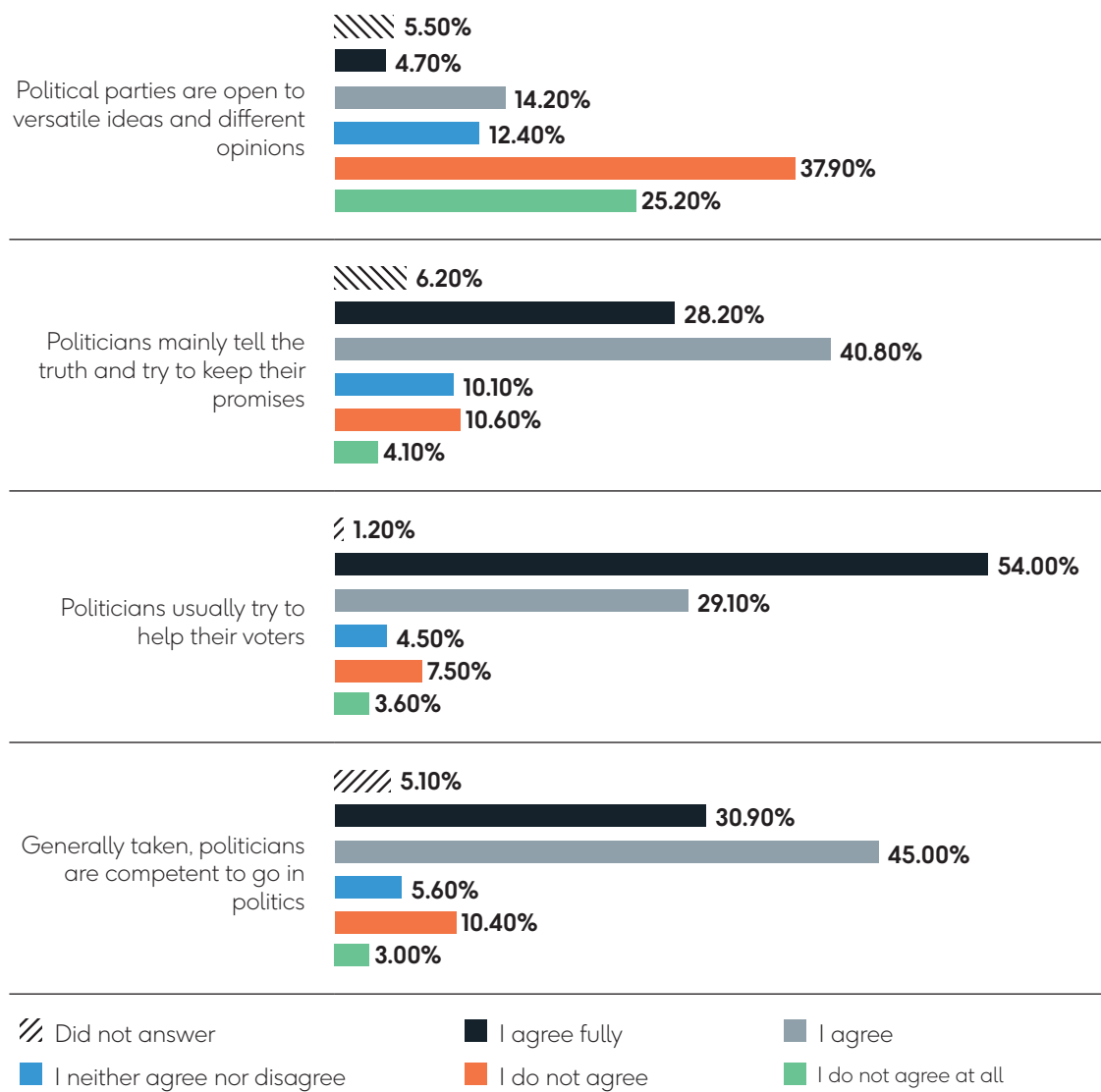
Focus groups held within the research confirm the results on political alienation. An identical view of focus group members is that citizens "stay away from politics", and that particularly refers to the young. The majority of participants are also of opinion that citizens are not interested in politics because they "got tired of it." The impression is that politics, political parties and politicians in general are, "discredited words", and the activity citizens do not want to have anything to do with.

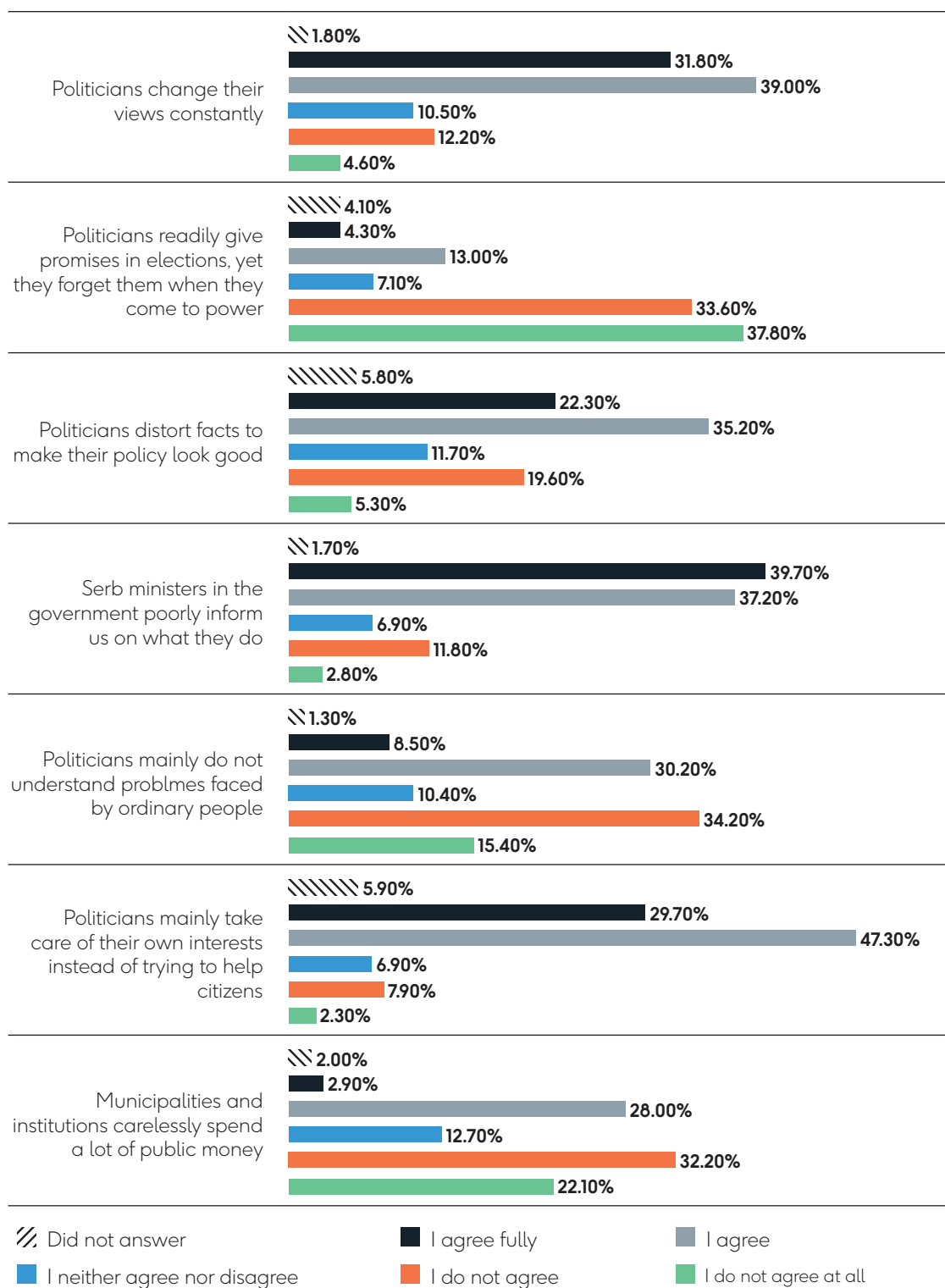
However, there are those who do not agree that the problem is lack of interest and they believe it is the fear of going in for politics as the young know what those who tried to change something and got involved into politics went through. That is why they are not prepared to stand this chance.

The last set of statements refer to the evaluation of attitudes toward political parties and politicians. The task of the respondents was to state using a five-grade scale to what extent they agreed with the offered statement. The results are shown on graphs 58 (a set of positively formulated statements) and 589 (6 sets of negatively formulated statements).

¹⁸ Focus group with participants of Serb ethnicity held as a Zoom conference in September 2020

Graph 5. To what extent do you agree with the following views?



Graph 6. To what extent do you agree with the following views?

In the last instrument used to measure the confidence of citizens in politicians, questions to which the participants responded focused on politicians and their openness (question 1), keeping promises (question 2), taking care (question 3), competence (question 4), consistency (questions 6 and 7), frankness (question 8), openness/transparency (questions 8-10), keeping promises (questions 11-12), and fairness (question 14).

Taking into account individual statements, the majority of respondents, as many as 78 % of them, doubt the intentions of politicians and believe they are pursuing only their personal interest, and are not dealing with citizens' interests, as well as that they generally do not understand the needs of citizens. A great number of citizens find the politicians inconsistent, even 70 % of them. In addition to that, citizens are not satisfied with the quantity of information they get from politicians of Serb ethnicity – 77 %.

These findings were confirmed in focus groups. Focus group participants also talked about a low level of confidence in politicians. Beside that, there is a disappointment in how politicians represent citizens and because they do not keep promises. Focus group participants also believe that political representatives and political parties are active only during election campaigns. The mistrust in politicians is widespread and relates both to politicians in power and those in the opposition.



“That is so simple. Even if there was the opposition, they do not struggle to benefit the country. It is always personal gain first, not the interest of the state or people. The next who come to power will also seek benefits. That is a vicious circle and citizens will suffer. There is nothing more to add. Talking about confidence, let's be frank, all of them have an intention from the beginning and that is to

provide more for themselves. They are focused on themselves, others come second. They are not there to struggle for democracy in the name of the people. Citizens have forgotten that they could be in control of the affairs, that politicians should work for the sake of citizens, not pursue their personal interests.”¹⁹

Focus group participants believe that politicians have in mind their own, not public wellbeing and that they generally lack competence to discharge the posts they are currently taking.

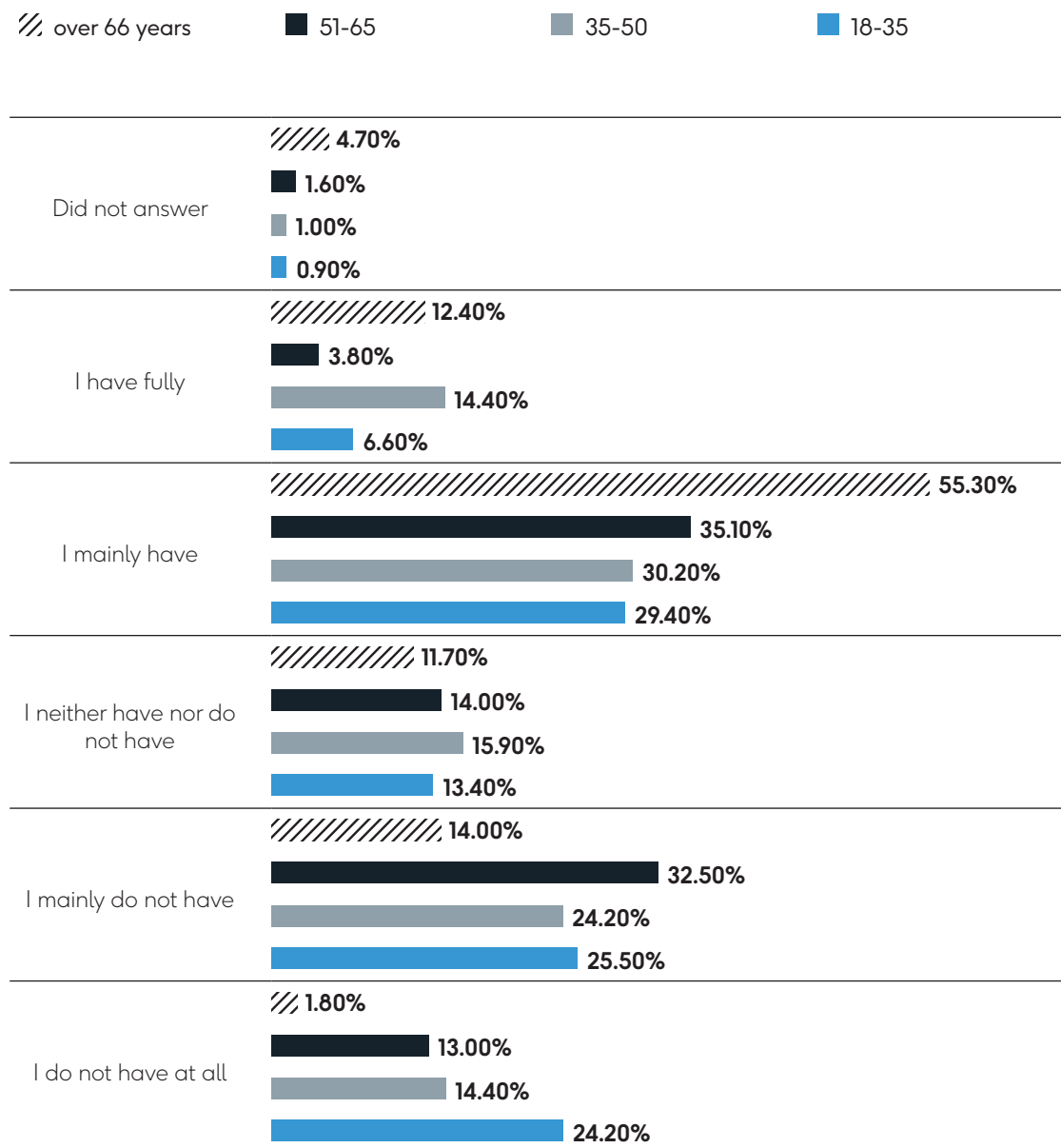
This finding is also confirmed by the representatives of political parties who point out that the very fact that members leave those who lose elections and join winners is telling that people join parties for personal interest. The interviewed representatives of parties confirmed that they witnessed losing membership who opted for a party in power.



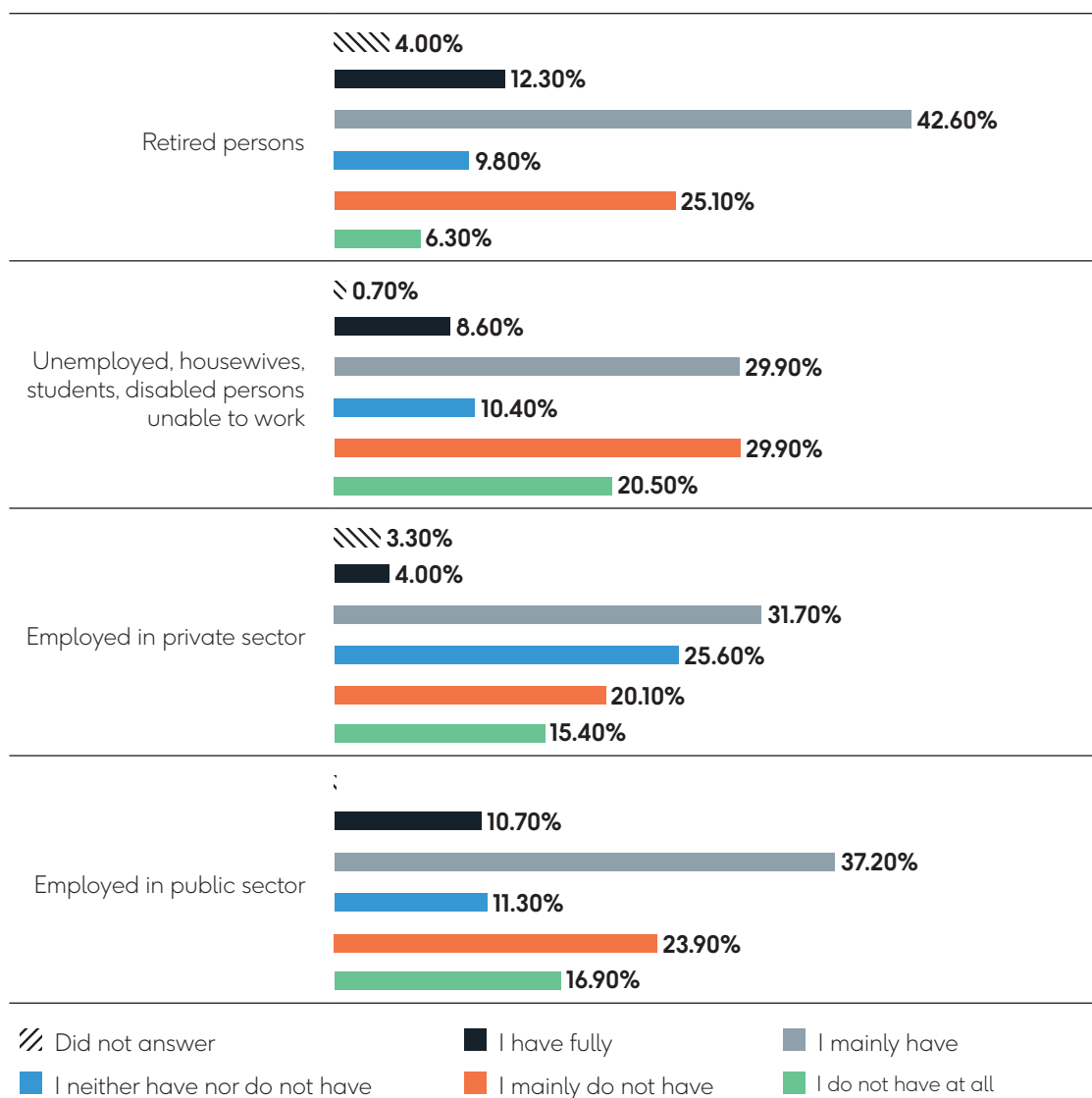
“To my regret, I believe that personal interest prevails, that is why parties in power have numerous membership which changes once they become the opposition. There are few individuals among us who are prepared to fight for our political beliefs and who do not change them. People join parties for personal interest, to get employment, donation, to get a better position to move up in their careers. I have not noticed any goal higher than that.”²⁰

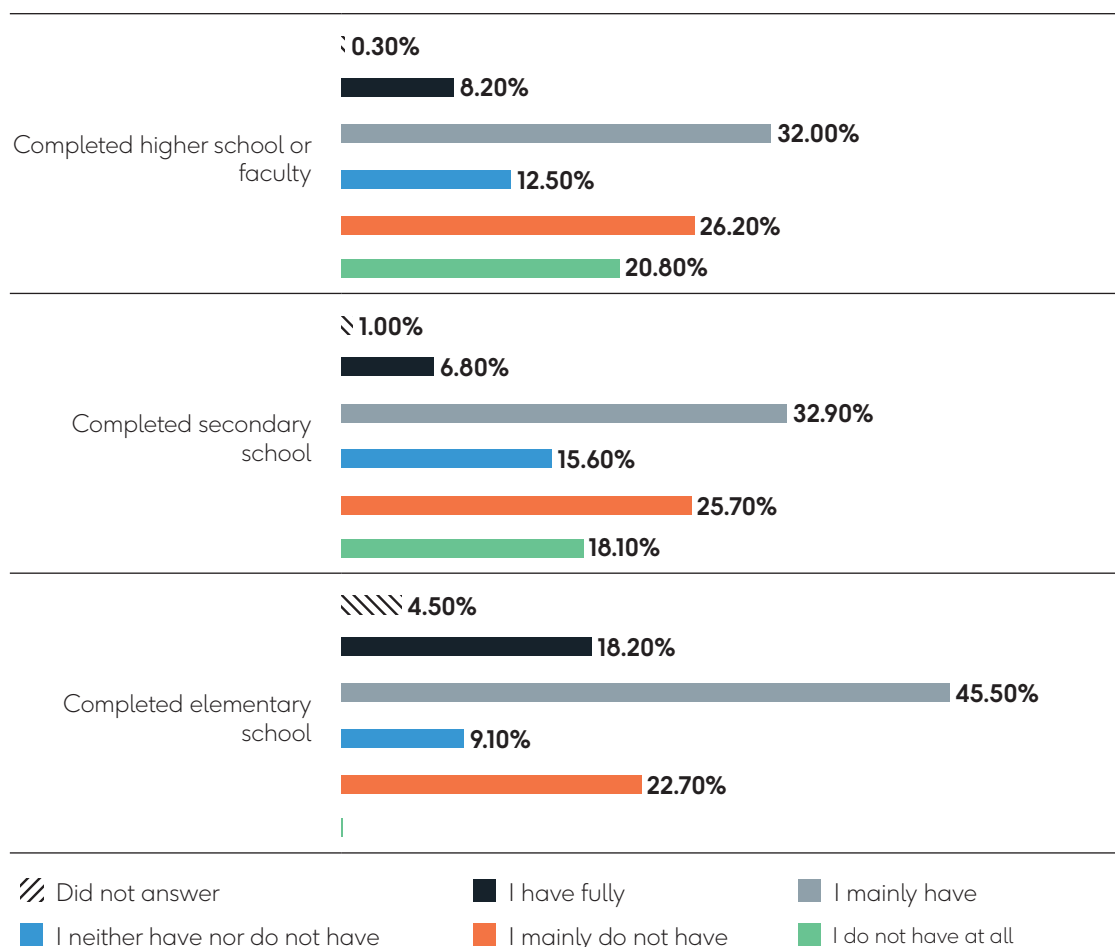
¹⁹ Focus group with citizens of Serb ethnicity held as a Zoom conference in September 2020.

²⁰ Interview with a KSP representative, October 2020.

Graph 7. Question Q24 – Serb political parties * age

Graph 8. question Q24 – Serb political parties * employment status



Graph 9. question Q24 – Serb political parties * education

The previous three graphs additionally illustrate the confidence of citizens in Serb political parties, post-certified by age, employment status and education. As many as 68 % of those older than 66 mainly have confidence in Serb political parties. The confidence of the young, age 18-29, have the least confidence, only 36 % of them. As far as the working age population above 30 is concerned, approximately 49 % of them have confidence in Serb political parties.

In the group of participants categorized by employment status, the highest confidence is that of retired persons, i. e. 55 % of them, and of those employed in the public sector, 48 %. The unemployed have the least confidence, only 37 % of them, as well as those employed in the private sector, 36 % of them.

The higher the education, the lower the support and confidence in the political parties of Kosovo Serbs. The most educated have the least confidence, only 40 % of those holding university diplomas, master and doctoral degrees. The highest confidence is of those who completed elementary school, 65 %.

The additional interviews we did with the representatives of political parties enabled us a more in-depth insight in the absence of political pluralism, as well as in the pressures the supporters and members of the opposition parties are exposed to. Representatives of the PDP, the KSP, the National Justice and the New Party of Kosovo state that any kind of disagreement with the official politics is suppressed.



“Simply said, any attempt of organizing is followed by straightforward pressures and threats toward every single individual who might wish to go in for politics.”²¹

Representatives of political parties see problems in the attitude to Serb politicians, in Belgrade and Prishtina alike. In case of Belgrade, they point out pressures and support only to one party enjoying all privileges and logistic support. At the same time they are blamed for discrediting the opposition.



“Serb opposition parties are labeled as treacherous, anti-Serbian... although they have not committed a single act of treason nor they would. The attitude of Belgrade to us is based on the principle of force, not on arguments.”²²

As far as the attitude of Prishtina to Serb political parties is concerned, the interviewees state that it is exclusively a relationship of convenience, that the members of the ruling elite in Kosovo do not have an open relationship with Serb political parties but seek the ways how to make them instrumental to their causes.



“In the majority of cases, the relationship with Albanian political parties does not exist. The only case when that could be taken as a kind of it is the day of voting for the Government of Kosovo and when the votes of Serb MPs are needed.”²³

21 Interview with a PDP representative, September 2020.

22 Interview with a KSP representative, October 2020.

23 Interview with a PDP representative, September 2020.

The representative of the KSP had a similar view, stating that despite a declarative view in Prishtina trying to present the Serbs as equal members of the society and participants in political processes, there is no such equality in reality as the Serbs are mostly excluded from everyday processes.

On the other hand, a representative of the People's Party says that the present situation, a simulation of political life and the absence of political pluralism in the Serb community fits everyone, from Belgrade to Prishtina and the international community as long as Belgrade and representatives of the Serbs are cooperative in the normalization process.



“As long as the policy of the Serb List suits Prishtina they will not in any way support/improve the development of democracy here (in terms of providing conditions for the opposition to be heard and seen). Contrary to that, they will also make efforts to make such cases invisible. Unfortunately, it is not only Prishtina. All international organizations in Kosovo are doing the same, they need the Serb List to bring the job they started to an end.”²⁴

Citizens who participated in the focus groups share the opinion on the absence of political pluralism. They are aware of its absence and it is their impression that there is only one political party. They also question democratic principles of the electoral process, stating they heard of and witnessed numerous irregularities in the elections. The objections primarily refer to organized voting, fear of citizens they could lose their job if they do not vote for the party in power and inability to state publicly one's opinion without getting into conflict with the ruling party.

24 Interview with a representative of the People's Justice, September 2020.



“I am of opinion that elections are not a free process, those who vote do that under duress, they are mainly employed with state institutions and forced to go to the polls and contribute a certain number of votes of the others. Due to that their freedom to vote is put at risk. As far as freedom of expression is concerned, those whose opinion differ from that of those in power do not want to express it in fear of putting at risk their livelihood as they or members of their families could be dismissed from work and if you do not have means of making living your life is endangered.”²⁵

Participants of focus groups also state that clientelism is widely spread and that it is possible to get job only through political connections and the political party in power, which enables the ruling party to control a great number of voters who do not necessarily have a good opinion of the politicians in power.

²⁵ Focus group with citizens of Serb ethnicity held as a Zoom conference is September 2020.

Recommendations:

- In accordance with the EU EOM recommendations, it is necessary to observe fundamental democratic rights in the election process to enable a free participation in all aspects of democratic life.
- Media in the Serbian language should pay more attention to political parties and their public activities to familiarize citizens with them.
- Assistance in internal fostering of political parties and their capacity-building through international programs which would contribute to equality in the participation of political parties of Kosovo Serbs in the political life and enable familiarization of citizens with political parties.
- Creating conditions for the implementation of laws and legal solutions preventing clientelism and partocracy which would prevent establishing a clientelist relationship between parties and citizens.

On the Initiative

"Democracy, Openness and Prospects of the Serb Community in Kosovo – Open" is a new initiative of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), initiated in 2020. Open is realized in cooperation with nine civil-society organizations that are active in the Serb community in Kosovo.

A general objective of this new initiative is development of an open and dynamic space for discussion within the Serb community and between the Serb and other communities, as well as among institutions in Kosovo.

- The initiative will specifically be engaged in the analysis and estimate of the impact of civil-society and political organizations on the implementation of democratic principles and openness of the Serb community in Kosovo.
- Implementation of democratic standards and the openness of institutions, public policies, and important processes in their relations with the Serb community in Kosovo will be analyzed and estimated, as well a degree of openness of the Serbian community towards them.
- These analyses will assist in understanding the current position and prospects of the Serbian community in Kosovo, serving at the same time as a basis of their argued advocacy among citizens, institutions, local and central authorities, and the international community.

Experienced and established civil-society organizations will make eight (8) sectoral analyses with the purpose of meeting general and specific objectives.

The areas analyzed by our partners in 2020 are as follows:

Media To what extent media in the Serbian language in Kosovo have an impact on the degree of openness, possibility to hear and pluralism of opinions and topics? This area is researched by **Media Center** and **Crno Beli Svet**.

Civil society How civil-society organizations give their contribution to openness and principles of democracy of the Serbian community and generally of Kosovo society? **New Social Initiative** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration** are dealing with this topic.

Political parties Observance of democratic principles and pluralist activism of political parties of the Kosovo Serbs, as well as their openness to participate in the political system of Kosovo and give their contribution to the improvement of public policies. These issues are in the focus of **New Social Initiative and Media Center**.

Responsibility of institutions Better understanding of the position of the Serbian community in Kosovo by observing the openness of the institutions to address the problems of the Serbs. This analysis is made by **Crno Beli Svet** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration**.

Security How the feeling of security affects the openness of the Serbian community to Kosovo security institutions? The answer to this question is sought by **Human Center Mitrovica**.

Economics To what extent are business entities from the communities with Serbian majority open to be integrated in the economy of Kosovo? This area is analyzed by **Institute for Territorial Economic Development**.

Rights of minorities How to get to a more open society through pointing out to the gaps in the implementation of the rights of minorities? This topic is dealt with by **NVO Aktiv** and **Center for the Rights of Minority Communities**.

Process of dialogue and normalization of relations between

Kosovo and Serbia To which extent and which positions of the community of the Kosovo Serbs are represented relating to the impact on and future of the process? **NVO Aktiv** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration** are dealing with this issue.

A consolidated report, „**Characteristics of the open society within Serb community in Kosovo**“, will be published at the end of Open 2020 cycle. It will consolidate results and conclusions from sectoral analysis made by members of Open 2020 initiative into a wider socio-political context of Kosovo.

The Open initiative is supported by KFOS

